

## Lesson 6: Balance

### Balanced vs. Unbalanced

So many people are in desperate need of rediscovering and regaining balance in life. The cocktail of reasons for lack of balance vary by person, but there are certainly some causes to which everyone can relate. For example, technology is constantly changing and altering our lives on a regular basis. While it can make life easier, for so many people technology adds a significant level of complication in which they feel trapped. The current work culture is another reason lives are out of balance. Hours are long and no one is guaranteed of having a job tomorrow. Taking care of children or aging parents is yet another reason many people's lives are out of balance. All of these reasons and so many more lead to lives of burnout, unmet expectations, lack of vacation and downtime and disappearing boundaries. No wonder balance seems impossible.

We see people striving for balance all the time. Winning athletic teams have found a way to obtain some measure of balance, and anyone experiencing a balanced budget knows the peace that can be found in having balance in at least that one area of life. An unbalanced load of laundry causes a lot of racket, and, in some cases, can cause the washer to stop running altogether until balance is restored. Balance is a constant state for which we strive in almost every nook and cranny of life.

A lack of balance equals a lack of control over life, and this state is often debilitating. We most appreciate the value of balance when it is absent. Anyone who has experienced vertigo fully understands this point. Vertigo is a condition in which a person feels like he/she is moving when that is not the case and/or the room is moving when it is not. Vertigo can cause nausea and is just simply an unpleasant condition resulting from a variety of conditions, diseases and even some medications. At its root, vertigo is a balance problem. When a person has vertigo, he or she can struggle with being able to function at times. Vertigo as a physical condition is not a fun experience, and vertigo in the overall life structure of a person presents a condition in which hopelessness prevails and burnout seems inevitable.

The problem seems to lie with the fact that most people seem out of touch with what a balanced life should like. Corbis says that *"For years, we have been taught to strive for balance in our lives. Frankly, however, most of us struggle to define what balance really is. What seems balanced to one may be extreme to another! What is the blueprint for a balanced way of life?"* In other words, balance is a relative state. A balanced life for one person can seem like a chaotic life for another. While we simply cannot resort to comparisons when it comes to creating a balanced life, we can learn a great deal from each other when it comes to balance.

So what is the blueprint for a balanced way of life? First we need to realize that balance does not necessarily mean that every part receives equal time, energy and resources nor does it mean the parts are of equal size. One of the definitions of balance is *"mental steadiness or emotional stability; habit of calm behavior, judgment, etc."*

- 1.) When was the last time you felt "mental steadiness" or "emotional stability"? If you can remember that time, how long did it last? Do you have a "habit of calm behavior" and a "habit of good judgment"?

A balanced state means that we have time to contemplate and to plan, both of which go a long way in creating mental steadiness. A balanced life uses emotions as gauges but does not allow them to control decisions and actions. When a person lives a life of balance, he or she is seen as someone who can calmly move through life without being so easily disrupted by the inevitable change and disruption that always comes. A balanced person is able to consistently make good decisions and has the confidence to move forward in decisions once they are made. When a life is balanced, mental steadiness, emotional

stability, calm behavior and good judgment are the rule rather than the exception. While this description may provide a blueprint for a balanced life, realizing that true balance is actually a myth can help to put the idea of balance into better perspective.

### **Balance is a Myth**

Our best example of what perfect balance looks like comes, of course, from our Creator. Balance and order certainly are part of God's character, and this can be seen in the way that he gave balance and order to creation (See Job 38) and why "creation groans" or "eagerly awaits" (Romans 8:19) in anticipation of restored order and perfection. Our world was created with perfection and order, and it was once perfectly balanced. Now, it waits for that balance to be restored.

But let's be clear on one thing: Until we get to Heaven, perfect balance will remain unreachable. In other words, balance is currently a myth. We may achieve moments and periods where we feel completely in balance and all in the world feels right, but those rarely last long and are generally just our perception and not reality. In other words, we always have some aspect that is not in balance simply because we are imperfect beings living in an imperfect world.

2.) How does Matthew 10:34-39 reinforce the idea that balance is unachievable this side of Heaven?

Jesus did not come to bring peace on earth. His presence in a life demands a decision, and often that decision will cause strife even between the closest of family members. Living a life that serves God will automatically place a person out of balance with the world and its desires. The idea of peace brings the idea of a balanced state where all elements involved are in homeostasis with one another. However, the life of a Christian is often one of unbalance and unrest as we fight against the unseen forces.

The idea of being perfected is really what we are getting at in this study when we talk about striving to achieve balance. And make no mistake about it: under our own power and efforts, this road to perfection is impossible to travel. Only through the refining work of the Holy Spirit and our relationship with Jesus Christ can we hope to reach perfection one day in eternity.

3.) What does Philippians 1:6 talks about being perfected, and how does this related to striving for balance in life?

The work that God began in each one of us will continue throughout our lifetime and finally be completed when we meet Jesus face-to-face. Jesus began to work for us when He died on the cross for our sins, a fate that we all deserved. This work then began within us when we first gave our lives to Him and asked Him to be Lord and Savior over us. Today, the Holy Spirit continues that work in us to help us to be more and more like Jesus – the model of perfect balance – every day. This process is one of Christian growth and maturity. It is a process of striving for perfect balance that will only be reached when Christ returns.

### **Jesus' Example of Balance**

To many, Jesus' life may not have seemed balanced. He didn't have a home, he didn't have a consistent source of food, and he was constantly interrupted. But let's return to a point that we made above: balance is a relative state. We simply cannot compare our lives to someone else's and think we will be happy if we have what they have. Balance looks different for everyone. That's not to say that we shouldn't pursue a life like Christ's, but it does mean that how we go about ministering and building relationship – which is what Christ focused on – will be unique to each individual's set of giftings.

While Jesus' life may not seem like one we would want today, it contains all the elements needed for a balanced life. After all, His main focus – His priority if you will – was to “go about the Father’s business.” (Luke 2:49, KJ) Everything Jesus did drove toward that main purpose.

- 4.) Read the Mark 6:30-34, Luke 5:16, and 1 Corinthians 13. What aspect of a balanced life is evident in the life of Jesus?

Jesus promoted rest, regular prayer and love for others. These must exist in a Christian's life in order to truly move toward balance. Every other aspect of life will remain out of balance until these are given priority. For the Christian, there is simply no away around this. In addition to these teachings to help us see where we should focus our lives, Jesus also seemed to be a flexible missionary who moved with the needs of the people.

- 5.) Read mark 6:33, 44 again. What did Jesus do when he realized that they were not going to get the rest they needed?

Jesus adapted to the situation and starting meeting needs. He taught his disciples a valuable lesson that day about the priority that meeting needs must sometimes take. That doesn't mean that rest wasn't important, but it did mean that for that moment, meeting needs was more important. This is the essence of balance: figuring out what the priority of the moment is and then committing fully to that. That means making and following through with plans but being willing to lay those plans aside for spontaneous acts of love as prompted by the Holy Spirit. When a person lives at 90%, the other 10% can provide the space needed to be flexible as Christ was flexible during his ministry on Earth.

### **Characteristics of a Balanced Christian**

The book of Colossians presents a terrific study of a balanced Christian life. The first two chapters focus on right thinking (knowledge and understanding) while the second half of the book, chapters 3 and 4, focus on the application of that right thinking and how we live. In essence, Colossians indicates that a balanced believer is stable, authentic and spirit-filled. But how does one achieve this type of balance?

- 6.) What four characteristics of a balanced Christian are listed on Colossians 3:16, 17?

These verses indicate the importance of wisdom, edification, thankfulness and consistency. Let's look at each one of these and the role each plays in the balanced Christian life.

#### ***Wisdom***

The word “dwell” in these verses means “to feel at home.” In other words, allowing God's word to “dominate, saturate, and motivate” our living leads us to a place where we are at home with its truth. God's truth becomes a part of who we are and cannot be separated from our character. That is true wisdom.

Wisdom has immense value. It gives happiness (Proverbs 3:13), provides many benefits (Proverbs 4:5-10), keeps us from evil (Proverbs 5:1-6), gives life (Ecclesiastes 7:12), makes us strong (Ecclesiastes 7:19), is better than any weapon (Ecclesiastes 9:18), insures stability (Isaiah 33:6), and produces good fruit (James 3:17).

As we are “saturated” in the truth of God's word, we are able to recognize error as well as to better make difficult decisions. What this means in our day-to-day lives is that we must read God's word daily and must never find dust on our Bibles if we are truly to be seeking His wisdom. With this type of wisdom, the road to perfection becomes much easier to travel.

## **Edification**

To edify another person means to build up another's faith. Edification is a close cousin to encouragement. The focus of a Christian's edification is the church (1 Corinthians 14:4-12), the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11, 12) and other Christians (Romans 14:19). Edification is accomplished through ministry (2 Corinthians 12:19), Christian gifts (1 Corinthians 14:3-12), the Word of God (Acts 20:32), love (1 Corinthians 8:1), spiritual things (Romans 14:19), seeking another's good (Romans 15:2) and God's authority (2 Corinthians 10:8).

Unfortunately, there are also hindrances to edification. Our carnal spirits (1 Corinthians 3:1-4), foolish questions (1 Timothy 1:3, 4), spiritual lukewarmness (Revelation 3:14-22) and a worldly spirit (James 4:1-6) can all hinder our ability to edify. But if we focus on how edification helps other Christians and on how it blesses God, we will discover how it goes hand in hand with balancing our lives. We get outside of ourselves when we edify another, and this allows us to balance the negative inner critic with which we all live with and fight daily.

## **Thankfulness**

Thankfulness is gratefulness expressed to another, and it can be described as a spiritual sacrifice (Psalm 116:17), a duty (2 Thessalonians 2:13), unceasing (Ephesians 1:16), spontaneous (Philippians 1:3), God's will (1 Thessalonians 5:18), and Heaven's theme (Revelation 7:12). We have a myriad of reasons to thank God, not the least of which is for food (John 6:11, 23), wisdom (Daniel 2:23), converts (1 Thessalonians 1:2), answered prayer (John 11:41), victory (1 Corinthians 15:57), salvation (2 Corinthians 9:15), the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:24), and changed lives (1 Thessalonians 2:13). When we are thankful, we become less negative and are able to focus on what we have and not on what we don't have. Thankfulness goes a long way in balancing out the negative aspects of life.

## **Consistency**

When considering the detailed in scripture that modeled a consistent striving toward balance and perfection in the will of God, Moses and Abraham probably come to mind. These men were not perfect, but they did consistently seek God, whether for wisdom or forgiveness. Their lives can be great lessons for us in how to incorporate consistency into our own lives. The more areas in which we develop consistency, the more effective our lives will be. This does not mean doing everything the same way all the time, but it does mean being consistent with our attitude and character in everything we do. When we fail in the area of being consistent Christians, we fail in being effective witnesses. No, we do not need to be perfect; it's impossible anyway. This is where consistency in picking ourselves up after mistakes and failures becomes important. People who are not Christians will see our consistent lives, and such lives will be a testimony to the power of Christ to enable us *"to will and to act according to his good purpose."* (Philippians 2:13)

Often, balance is relegated to only what we DO, and not much thought is given to how WHO WE ARE affects whether or not we have a balanced life. The characteristics given in Colossians 3:16 & 17 focus on who we are as well as what we do. This is the true path toward balance.

- 7.) As the New Year approaches, what one characteristic from Colossians 3:16 & 17 will you focus on in your efforts to become more balanced? Brainstorm a list of ways that you can improve in this area. Share your list of ideas with someone. (You can share it on our blog if you want!)

## **Setting Priorities**

A common list of priorities for Christians generally goes something like this: 1.) God; 2.) Family; 3.) Church; 4.) Work; and 5.) Everything else. The problem with this type of priority list is that we treat God

as another item to which we need to allocate time. God is not simply an item at the top of a priority list, an item to be balanced. He is the scale, the standard by which we balance every aspect of our lives.

To help us in understanding how God wants us to view priorities, let's take a look at what has been termed "The Divine Priority."

8.) Please read Philippians 3:8. What has Paul come to understand should be our top priority?

Knowing Jesus is our one and only priority. All of our other priorities should point directly to this one priority, and knowing Jesus should infuse into as well as impact and shape every other area of our lives. Knowing Jesus is the measuring rod and the scale by which we determine and set all other priorities.

9.) Read Philippians 1:21 & 3:13 and James 1:8. How can these verses help us in our quest to live more balanced lives?

Paul talks about doing "one thing." That one thing is to live for Christ. This type of focus helps prevent us from being "double-minded" and "unstable" in all our ways. When we focus on living for Christ, everything we do becomes driven by that focus. Having a single focus that drives all we do goes a long way in helping to prioritize and event to eliminate that which steals our time, making us less effective. Setting priorities is not just about organizing what we want to accomplish, it is also about choosing to eliminate unnecessary things as well. When eliminate the unnecessary and focus on "one thing," we not only increase in effectiveness, but we also create a much more balanced life.

Author Marty Nemko had this to say about balance and margin (capacity) in life: *"Don't give 110%. I have a client who gives 110%. Yes, he reaps rewards, but he's stressed out much of the time, makes mistakes as a result, and hasn't developed close relationships. The most successful people I know give 90%. They stay in the moment, tack their projects slowly but steadily, and don't waste time worrying about what's ahead. They have the emotional reserves to develop relationships and enjoy work."*

10.) Does Nemko's advice seem counterintuitive to you? Consider how giving 90% might make you more effective and successful. What would you do with that extra 10%?

### **Keys to a Balanced Life**

Living a balanced live means learning to say "no" to some things, and many of those things are good things, to allow you to say "yes" to what fits in with God-given priorities. Sometimes, figuring out where we specifically need to focus requires time away, perhaps in a retreat or just a relaxing vacation on a beach that allows us to reflect, refresh and reconnect.

11.) What does Titus 2:11, 12 teach us about decision making?

Saying "yes" to only those things God wants for us and "no" to anything that gets in the way of his purpose for our lives takes a lot of self control. But once we learn how to effectively and appropriately say "yes" as well as "no," and we do get better at it the more we practice as well as the more we are guided by the Holy Spirit, we will discover that we are better able to *"live self-controlled, upright and godly lives."*

What's even more important is taking time for God in your life on a regular basis and deliberately creating space for Him in your life. To a great extent, this means purposefully living according to the God-given rhythms that help determine when we should sleep, eat & rest. This also means praying over your schedule and allowing yourself to be led by the Holy Spirit.

## Be Proactive

An out-of-control (unbalanced) life is often the reason we make mistakes that bring pain to family, friends and self. What's more, bloated schedules and overstuffed lives lead to uncomfortable feelings of tightness and an inability to do what is healthy. Unfortunately, a catastrophe often needs to happen before much-needed change is made. Change then takes place on the terms defined by the catastrophe and leaves us with seemingly very little control. On the other hand, being proactive about change allows us to work toward balance on our own terms and with more options from which to choose.

Finding balance is the key to good mental, physical and spiritual health. You cannot give what you don't have, so work to have what you would like to give to others. Focus on gratitude for blessings rather than on proving value. Realize that your worth comes from your Creator and not what you do or how much you do. Knowing who you are as a Christian can be the motivation needed to take a step each day toward balance. For when you are balanced, you then have time and energy to give toward the ones you love. In other words, you have enough emotional, physical and spiritual margin to live not just for yourself but for family and friends and, even more importantly, for the One who gave you life.

12.) Read the following scripture and note what it says about you as a Christian believer.

- Romans 8:15-17
- 1 Corinthians 9:25
- Exodus 19:5
- Ephesians 1:4 & 2:10
- Jeremiah 1:5 & 29:11
- Psalm 139:13-16

You are an heir of God and a co-heir with Christ! You have a crown that will last forever! You are a treasured possession! You were chosen before the creation of the world, and you were made for a purpose! God formed you, knows you and has good plans for you! You were fearfully and wonderfully made! If knowing all of this doesn't put your life in perspective and give you a focus that will drive you toward balance, there's probably much – if anything – that will make that happen.

## Small Changes

*"What makes me a success is being me, and it's the little things I do, the sentences that make up the big sweeping paragraphs, that make me a success. These little things count for far more than the big things."* (Olin Morales)

1. Assess the role of technology in your life. How can you use it appropriately and not be controlled by it?
2. Develop a mission statement to help guide you in making decisions.
3. Set short and long-term goals. Consider 2012 Resolutions as well as setting broader goals that reach beyond the next year.
4. Develop an action plan to reach each of your goals.
5. If you aren't doing so already, choose to start every day spending time with the Lord.
6. Create a master "to do" list and then prioritize it. Pick items from it to make as a priority for each day.
7. Consider keeping a prayer journal that you can review periodically to help you see progress and remember answered prayers.

8. Pray daily over your calendar.
9. Get feedback from others.
10. Buy and read a book that will help you become more balanced.